Haunting Legacies: Family and Archival Photographs in Aleksandra Garlicka's Taxonomy of Polish Society (1985–95)

Gil Pasternak and Marta Ziętkiewicz

Abstract

This article expands knowledge about photography's participation in pro-democratic socio-political processes in the years leading to the demise of the communist Polish People's Republic and during the creation of the post-communist Third Republic of Poland. Scholarship on photography in Poland's late-communist period of the 1980s tends to focus on the work of politically critical art photographers. It looks especially at practitioners who denounced state museums and galleries in protest at the government's repression of human rights and political diversity. Scholarship on photography in Poland's post-communist era of the early 1990s usually persists in prioritizing the study of artistic photographs, exploring how the new reality in the country diversified their subject matter, style, and political orientation. In this article we shift attention towards photographic exhibitions that were installed in Poland's formal cultural institutions in the late 1980s, and we consider uses of non-artistic photographs in the country's public sphere of the late-communist and early post-communist periods alike. To do so, we introduce the work of historian and curator Aleksandra Garlicka, analyzing five exhibitions she organized between 1985 and 1995. In all of these, Garlicka employed archival photographs to access histories of Polish society that the communist state had striven to repress. Yet she also called on members of the public to share with her their family photographs in order to deepen the scope of her endeavor. Drawing on archival sources, interviews, and Polish literature from the period in question, we demonstrate how Garlicka deployed these photographs to promote political change in one of Poland's most turbulent historical moments of the twentieth century. Also considering the reception and impact of her curated shows, we argue that, in Garlicka's hands, the display of photographs in Poland's dominant exhibition spaces challenged communist ideology and helped the Poles to come to terms with its legacies.

Keywords: Photography exhibitions, collective memory, family photographs, curatorial practices, Poland's social history

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As communist politics was gradually weakening in the Eastern Bloc in the early 1980s, the Polish People's Republic entered a period of social and political upheavals, underpinned by the 1980 establishment of the *Solidarity* trade union. Led primarily by self-governing labor unions and supported by the intelligentsia, *Solidarity* employed forms of non-violent civil resistance such as protests, strikes, and demonstrations to broaden labor and human rights in the country. In its efforts to turn the Polish people into politically involved subjects while they were still being watched by the communist Polish United Workers' Party (hereafter PZPR), *Solidarity* constituted a moment of rupture in Poland's communist history, leading Polish society to question the relationship between socialist ideology and the reality of lived experience in the country virtually on a daily basis. Although the Polish People's Republic made various attempts to suppress the movement and its activities, the era of *Solidarity* lasted for nearly a decade, until PZPR lost power in the semi-free elections that took place in June 1989 (Davies 2005, 482–508).

The culture that developed in Poland under the influence of *Solidarity* embraced historical exploration and stimulated social rediscovery. As *Solidarity* strove to enhance the political power and social rights of the Polish people, its spirit trained the public to develop sensitivities to the complexity of Polish society alongside a renewed understanding of the Polish nation's past. The ethos of *Solidarity* continued inspiring Polish society and culture at the beginning of the 1990s, when the Polish nation found itself having to establish the parameters for the creation of a new political system, negotiate the meaning of democratic freedom, and determine its scope and limitations in an emerging post-communist state (Davies 2005, 509–518).

From the beginning of the twenty-first century especially, photography scholars and art historians had begun studying the history of photography during Poland's gradual transition from authoritarian communism to democratic politics and free market economy. Contributions that look at photography in Poland during the country's late communist era of the 1980s tend to revolve around politically critical art photography (Ziębińska-Lewandowska 2014, 131–143; Mazur 2009, 249–253, 437–449; Jurecki 1989; Rottenberg 2005, 159–160, 283–288). They focus most often on those practitioners who contested the state's authoritarian rule or, at least, its favored artistic taste and cultural values. Significantly, scholarship addressing photography during that period particularly prioritizes the work of art photographers who exhibited in venues that were not officially sanctioned by the state, such as churches, communal galleries, and privately-owned converted spaces. Literature on photography in Poland during the country's post-communist period of the 1990s is often written by the same scholars (Lechowicz

2010, 142–153; Mazur 2009, 260–266, 449–455; Rottenberg 2005, 335–361). In the context of this historical timeframe, their works usually follow three main research trajectories. The first revolves around practitioners who began to photograph subjects that were previously normally forbidden by the communists, such as national minorities and religious folklore. The second analyses the influences that Western cultural traditions have exerted on the development of art and documentary photography in the years that followed the demise of the Eastern Bloc and the end of the Cold War. The third trajectory explores the work of photographers who used the medium to reflect on socio-politics in the newly formed post-communist Polish state, and express criticism of the social, cultural, and national values of the rising democratic political hegemony.

While scholarship concerning photography in Poland of the 1980s and 1990s is indeed informative and enlightening, at the time of this writing it seems equally sparse and narrow in scope. First, in taking great interest in artistic photographic practices, it neglects to account for other unofficial types and uses of photographs from that socially, culturally, and politically turbulent time.[1] Second, in zooming in on the exhibited work of so-called radical art photographers, explorations of photographic practices from Poland's late communist period limit exposure to knowledge and understanding of exhibitions that were hosted by official state museums and galleries during the country's socio-political instabilities of the 1980s. Furthermore, as such they regularly detract from the photographic work and activities of individuals who, for one reason or another, continued to work in collaboration with the communist authorities.

In this article we begin to address these gaps through discussion of a series of public displays that were put together by photographer, historian, publicist, and curator Aleksandra Garlicka between 1985 and 1995. During this ten-year period, she curated a total of five photographic exhibitions, each of which triggered lively public responses and helped transform the way in which Polish society was able to imagine its own image and values. In the second half of the 1980s, Garlicka presented the shows *Photography of Polish Peasants* (*Fotografia chłopów polskich*; 1985) and *Workers* (*Robotnicy*; 1989). In the first half of the 1990s, she displayed the exhibitions *The People of Lwów and their City: Photographs 1860–1945* (*Lwowiacy i ich miasto. Fotografie z lat 1860–1945*; 1991), *Others Among Us* (*Inni wśród swoich*; 1992), and *Polish Intelligentsia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: Photographs 1848–1989* (*Inteligencja polska XIX i XX wieku. Fotografie z lat 1848–1989*; 1995). Garlicka installed the first two exhibitions in one of Poland's largest state-endorsed galleries, when PZPR largely attempted to repress the *Solidarity* movement and crush its pro-democratic spirit. The remaining three exhibitions opened to the public after the communist government had been replaced and while Polish society was entering into the country's post-communist historical phase. In all these exhibitions, Garlicka presented photographs from family and archival collections. By doing so, she intended to draw out the history of the Polish nation and the traits of Polish society from records that she perceived as more credible than those that the communist state circulated across Poland for nearly half of the twentieth century. As we demonstrate below, in the second half of the 1980s her use of private and historical photographs largely aided Garlicka to achieve her goal without raising much suspicion from the communist

authorities, while in the first half of the 1990s it enabled her to expand the Polish nation's collective memory and confront some enduring legacies of communist politics that still dominated the Polish social and cultural imagination.

To trace and analyze Garlicka's work and its impact during the period in question, we studied materials that she created herself alongside written sources by others about her or her work. Some of these included documents from Garlicka's private collection and writings that she had published on photography and her curatorial projects in books, exhibition catalogues, and magazines. Others mainly comprised archival sources from the institutions that hosted Garlicka's exhibitions and the diverse reviews that the latter received in periodicals of the time. However, in order to come closer to Garlicka's more immediate environment and tap deeper into her photography related professional and academic concerns, we also interviewed individuals who knew Garlicka in a professional capacity and accompanied at least part of her journey in the 1980s and 1990s. While we certainly felt that all of them shared their frankest recollections of Garlicka's personality, interests and achievements with us, we endeavored to verify their memories through recourse to other primary or secondary sources whenever it was possible.

In what follows, we provide background to Garlicka's conceptualization of photography, primarily via discussion of her contributions to academic thinking on the subject. Demonstrating the role that state and social politics played in shaping her approach to the medium, we particularly emphasize her understanding of the relationship between photography, history, and collective memory, along with her aspiration to qualify family and archival photographs as historical sources, at the very least of equal credibility to written sources and historical accounts. Yet, underpinned by the condition of the political transition that defined the experience of everyday life in Poland of the 1980s and 1990s, the core of the article provides in-depth analysis of Garlicka's curated exhibitions from that time, including their reception, sociocultural impact, and later legacies. Through this discussion, we elaborate the scope of knowledge about the absorption of photography into pro-democratic socio-political processes that unfolded in the Poland of the late communist era, as well as regarding photography's participation in the gradual democratization of Polish social and cultural spheres shortly after communism lost control over the country.

In Pursuit of True History

Aleksandra Garlicka (nee Mierzecka) was born in Lwów in 1933. The daughter of renowned Polish photographer Janina Mierzecka, she took up photography herself at a young age and participated in numerous exhibitions across Poland from 1951. In the same year, she began studying history at the University of Wrocław, and in 1956 she was awarded a Master's degree in the subject from the University of Warsaw. Between 1951 and 1953, Garlicka worked in the photo lab of the National Museum in Wrocław, where she was also occasionally tasked with producing photographs of monuments and artworks for the institution's collection. In 1954 she was accepted as a member of the Association of Polish Artistic Photographers, which enabled

her to develop her photographic practice alongside likeminded practitioners. In the early 1970s, however, when the Association established a History of Photography Section, Garlicka was able to bring her passion for photography and history together. Becoming one of the Section's most active members, she turned research into the history of photography in Poland and beyond into the focus of her personal and academic interests. Significant to the development of her work in the field in the second half of the 1970s was the fact that photography came into prominence in Poland's cultural sphere at the very same time, owing at least in part to socio-political transformations in the country.

The main cause of these transformations can be traced back to the appointment of Edward Gierek to the position of the PZPR's First Secretary in December 1970. Stepping into power, the new leader eased censorship, obtained foreign loans, and increased wages as a means to unite the Polish people behind his leadership and motivate them to support the reinvigoration of the communist system, despite its numerous failures to improve their lives until then. The policies he implemented in the first half of the 1970s rendered Poland much more susceptible to Western influence, as well as tolerant of attempts to reform the cultural sphere (Davies 2005, 469–471). The generation of emerging Polish artists of the time turned to experiments with new media in an attempt to challenge the perceived separation between aesthetic experience and that of everyday life. In particular, photography gained great popularity, as it was accessible, easy to use, and immediate enough to converge creative practice and ordinary experiences. While Poland had had no official cultural policy since the de-Stalinization of the Eastern Bloc in the mid-1950s, art photographers in Gierek's time understood that the political system was willing to tolerate only a certain level of creative freedom and that direct criticism of state politics was off-limits. Their radicalism primarily materialized, therefore, in their endeavor to reform aesthetic taste and bridge the gap between popular culture and the cultural values favored by the state (Lechowicz 2010, 82–85).

This reality began to change in 1976, when the Polish state found itself unable to pay back its foreign debts or provide citizens with essential goods at an affordable price. In June of that year, following Gierek's decision to increase food prices by an average of 60 percent, strikes, protests, and demonstrations broke out in multiple cities across the country. Although the government subsequently decided to repeal this plan, it still lost the support of the people for introducing the policy in the first place (Davies 2005, 471–472). Hoping to regain the people's trust, towards the end of the 1970s the Government permitted a significantly greater level of freedom of speech and expression. Coupled with the ever-growing dissatisfaction of the Poles with their state's political disposition, this policy has led a critical mass of Polish professional and amateur photographers to use their medium as a means to capture an uncompromising visual account about the living conditions that Polish citizens had to tolerate daily. Known at the time as "black documentary" (Barbara Kosińska, personal communication, January 9, 2019), historians of Polish photography have referred to this innovative development as a "documentary turn", and argued that it was characterized by a desire to bypass and discredit the state's official information-distribution mechanisms (Ziębińska-Lewandowska 2014, 131–136). Its emergence coincided with growing local intellectual interest in Western neo-Marxist scholarship, which inspired critiques of the institutional

discourses and historical metanarratives sanctioned by powerful elites and state officials. In the context of photography, the work of renowned authors such as Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Pierre Bourdieu, Julio Cortázar, Gisèle Freund, and Susan Sontag reached Poland mainly via museum and gallery curators who occasionally liaised with their peers in the west (Kosińska, personal communication, 31 December 2018). By the late 1970s, these authors' socially oriented theories and approaches to photography had largely become integral to Polish scholarly debates.[2]

Garlicka was not necessarily an avid reader of foreign photographic scholarship, but she attended subject-specific conferences and read related book reviews in order to keep informed about its scope and innovations (Kosińska, personal communication, 31 December 2018). She became widely known on the Polish scholarly photographic scene in the mid 1970s, having initiated an ambitious project in 1976 that resonated with the growing local interest in socially oriented photographic practices, a project that would also define her intellectual interests and photographic activities in years to come. Aiming to identify nineteenth- and twentieth-century photographic artworks and photographs of noteworthy historical events concerning Poland and the Polish nation, Garlicka received a modest financial support from the Ministry of Culture and Art to assemble information about the attributes of photographs in the country's largest museums and libraries (Garlicka 1980). Altogether, she was able to record 4,000 photographs that met her criteria, and her findings inspired a greater number of artists, scholars, and curators to appreciate the historical, social, and cultural value of photographs.[3]

From 1978 in particular, Garlicka contributed regularly to the development of photography-based historical research in the country and to the expansion of photographic scholarship more broadly. Her originally authored articles, coupled with her reviews of photography books and exhibitions, appeared in the Polish journal *Fotorafia* on a regular basis, and in 1983 she joined its editorial board. With the exception of literature on photographic processes, equipment, technical knowledge, and technical skills, *Fotografia* had been the only, and thus most widely read, journal on photography in the country. Between its first appearance in 1976 and its closure in 1989, it focused on regional and international photographic theories, histories, and contemporary practices, mainly but certainly not only artistic.[4]

From her early contributions to the journal, Garlicka aspired to establish photographs as legitimate research sources for the study of social and cultural history. She therefore repeatedly emphasized the need to expand knowledge of the photographic collections preserved by archives around the country. At the same time, she also called on her readers to remember that photographs tend to circulate and that, subsequently, the largest portion of historical photographs concerning Polish society and culture is in fact preserved in private domestic collections. This understanding would become the main driving force in Garlicka's later curatorial projects. Nevertheless, already by the late 1970s it had led her to perceive photographs as objects caught up in social, cultural, and political processes. "The history of photography", she stated in a 1978 article, "cannot be separated from the history of the country, which was the object and model for photography" (Garlicka 1978a, 8).

To advance her approach to photographic materials as scientifically legitimate historical sources, in the same year Garlicka (1978b) initiated a series of articles on institutional

collections of photography in Poland, which resulted in 23 contributions from archivists, librarians and academics that were published in issues of *Fotografia* over a period of ten years.

Garlicka's enthusiasm for collecting and preserving historical photographs may not immediately appear directly related to the political conditions that underpinned lived experience in Poland, nor to the communist administration of the country's visual sphere. However, between 1979 and 1981 she in fact rapidly became curious to understand how photographs may be drawn upon to describe what kind of a people the Poles had been before the communist regime reshaped their perceived identity. Her interest in this specific question was triggered by two somewhat complementary exhibitions that opened to the general public around that time (Garlicka 1982). Entitled *Poles' Self Portrait*, one was on display in the National Museum in Kraków in 1979–80. Consisting of artworks and installations of various traditional media such as painting and sculpture, it featured portraits of Polish individuals that had been created over a period of 1,000 years (see also Guichard-Marneur 2017). The other exhibition, entitled *Polish Photography until 1914*, was installed in September 1981 at the Krasiński Palace in Warsaw, part of the National Library. While *Poles' Self Portrait* mainly displayed the refined artworks of so-called great masters, the photographs presented in *Polish Photography until 1914* had been made by professional and amateur photographers who worked within the Polish lands and in other parts of Europe at any time between the invention of photography and the beginning of the First World War (Garlicka 1982, 7).

To shape the image of the Polish people as supporters of the Soviet Union, the communists portrayed members of Polish society as workers and peasants. This rendered the nation as compatible with the myth of the worker-peasant alliance that paved the way for the emergence of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1917 (Patnaik 2017). *Poles' Self Portrait* and *Polish Photography until 1914* were the first large-scale exhibitions to have legitimately inserted images about the pre-communist history of the Polish people into official public sociocultural spaces that were controlled by the state. They therefore enabled their viewers to reconnect with the otherwise repressed heritage of their ancestors, reimagine themselves as the descendants of a people with a rich history of some long hundreds of years, and perceive the socially and culturally homogenizing character of the communist doctrine as a disruption to the altogether more organic development of the Polish nation and its traditions.

Without a doubt, however, it was *Polish Photography until 1914* that impressed Garlicka most. As she explained in retrospect, this exhibition constituted the first opportunity to learn about the work and geographical distribution of a great number of Polish professional and amateur photographers (Garlicka 1982, 7). Even more significantly in Garlicka's view, it provided what she saw as primary historical evidence capable of evoking the Polish people's so-called inner identity, with its innate sociocultural pluralism (cf. Garlicka 1982, 4). Speaking of the images one encountered through the photographs shown in *Polish Photography until 1914*, renowned journalist Andrzej (Ibis) Wróblewski **(**1981**)** argued in his review of the exhibition that "History shaped these faces, cities and landscapes. Photographers documented them so that we could look at them today as if we were looking at ourselves in a dusty mirror." His words would resonate with Garlicka in the following months (Garlicka 1982, 7), during which PZPR, following the rising popularity of *Solidarity*, appointed General Wojciech

Jaruzelski as its First Secretary in an attempt to crush the political opposition to the communist government, restore its authority, and regain control over Polish society.

To advance these goals, on 13 December 1981 Jaruzelski declared Martial law, subsequently rendering censorship much stricter and significantly more restrictive (Donefner 2017, 299–301). At the midst of this unfolding reality, Garlicka published her own review of *Polish Photography until 1914*, in which she wrote that: "Today, at a time of great hunger for true history, photography, owing to its authenticity, satisfies this hunger better than many publications" (1982, 7). From this moment on she dedicated the rest of her professional life to restoring the Polish nation's multifaceted social, cultural, and political disposition through analysis and display of historically emotive photographs.

Softening Communism

When General Jaruzelski lifted Martial law on 22 July 1983, PZPR retained strict control over the circulation of information by adding permanent restrictive amendments to the existing law on censorship. The amendments were intentionally vague, enabling censors to interpret them according to the requirements of the party at any given moment (Donefner 2017, 315; Romek 2015, 20). Although in practice censorship weakened during the remaining years of the 1980s, the state maintained its ability to restrict freedom of speech and expression at will. In protest at the precarity of social and cultural life in the country, for the majority of the second half of the 1980s numerous Polish artists and intellectuals withdrew from participation in state-endorsed artistic endeavors; some also boycotted official institutions (Lechowicz 2010, 85–86).

Garlicka chose a different path. As soon as Martial law ended, she began working on a photographic project whose intention was to restore histories of the Polish people that the communists had worked hard to repress. The first fruits of her endeavor materialized in the 1985 exhibition *Photography of Polish Peasants* (for which she sourced the photographs in collaboration with journalist Maria Bijak) and the 1989 exhibition *Workers*.[5] The two shows were Garlicka's most daring curatorial outputs, not only because she displayed them when communist rule still prevailed but also because she installed them in Zachęta Gallery in the center of Warsaw. The gallery constituted part of a building that housed the Central Bureau for Art Exhibitions, which was established by the Ministry for Art and Culture in 1949 to administrate artistic activities across Poland.

While working with this state institution, Garlicka designed her exhibitions to challenge the establishment's political disposition from within. As we demonstrate below, in order to accomplish that, she largely drew on politically charged yet innocent-looking family photographs that she obtained from members of the public, and she installed her shows in apparent compliance with the display style that was favored by the communist leadership. To get her exhibitions approved by the censor, she mostly ensured that such photographs were not presented in a way that conflicted unquestionably with communist ideology (Kosińska, personal communication, 31 December 2018).[6]

Cultivating Public Participation

Both *Photography of Polish Peasants* and *Workers* were based on contributions from the public. For their organization Garlicka first published an open call for submissions of photographs, prompting potential participants to annotate them in order to render the materials into functional research sources. By itself, Garlicka's employment of open calls for public contributions already challenged the traditional communist information-management strategy, as it replaced top-down communication schemes with a bottom-up approach to the production and dissemination of knowledge. Providing the Polish people with a means to participate in the design of the exhibitions, it created for them opportunities to visualize their memories and stories and consolidate their knowledge and beliefs. The Polish people had had only very few, if any, opportunities to do so virtually by themselves since the end of the Second World War.

While being aware of the democratizing potential encapsulated in her open calls, Garlicka organized the 1985 and 1989 exhibitions when the dissemination of information in public was still subject to censorship. She therefore limited them to photographic histories of the pre-communist era, as a means to pitch the projects to those in charge as completely unrelated to the realities of the communist period. In actuality, however, the exhibitions revealed a gap between communist and individual life narratives about the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century living conditions of the Polish nation. They thus exposed a lack of correlation between communist and social Polish historiography that made the photographs relevant to the reality experienced by the Poles since the communists came to power.

For *Photography of Polish Peasants*, for example, Garlicka received 576 submissions containing over 6,000 annotated photographs. Some were sent from collectors, institutions, and professional photographers. But the majority were sent by individual families (Garlicka and Bijak 1993, 9). Featuring representations of everyday experiences from across the partitioned and reunited Polish lands between the 1880s and 1945, the resulting exhibition showed peasants at home, at school, and at work; in wedding-day celebrations; at first communion; during traditional festivals and amongst friends and relations in many other moments of sociability. Communist politics framed the peasantry of the pre-communist period as a homogenous class – poor, uneducated, and altogether disheartened. In the communist historical narrative, the implementation of socialist politics gave the peasants lands, provided them with free education, and empowered them to rise up the social ladder (Patnaik 2017). As the show was dedicated to the history of Polish peasants before the rise of Polish communist rule, Garlicka had strategically chosen to accompany the exhibition invitation card with a photograph connoting the ideological image of the peasantry that the communists conjured up to sustain this narrative (fig. 1). Yet the exhibition itself provided its audiences with photographic records that framed the pre-communist characteristics and history of peasants differently. Depicting some of them in uniforms of the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian armies during the days of the First World War, and as soldiers and officers of the Polish army in its aftermath, the photographs told the story of a community that had been divided, significantly diversified, and later reunited – all by political histories. Photographs of peasants at school suggested the efforts and aspirations of members of this social layer to self-

improve. Photographs against religious sites gave expression to the moral values and traditional beliefs they embraced. Photographs of funerals laid out the range of religious denominations that Polish peasants followed, and photographs from work focused primarily on rest and celebrations. There were also photographs of firefighters, members of parliament, and sportspeople, wedding-day portraits, pictures from outings to the countryside, from traditional festivals, and at photography studios. All of these constituted records of social mobility as they portrayed the peasants' adherence to folk principles alongside their adjustment to modern customs. Through the exhibition, Polish peasants surfaced as a diverse social layer, whose identity, culture, lived experiences, and economic conditions could neither be defined so easily nor articulate the communist image of Polish peasants without difficulty.

The photographs Garlicka installed in *Workers* of 1989 exposed discrepancies between communist and social historiography in a comparable way. This exhibition focused on the emergence of the working social layer prior to the communist era, employing the open-call model as a means to tell its history. Communist propaganda tended to portray workers as socialist political activists: anonymous, secular, and united behind the ethics of hard labour. As a result, they seemed to have been a homogenized social class and its perceived members associated with commitment to socialist political radicalism. Similar to *Photography of Polish Peasants*, in *Workers* Garlicka avoided commenting on the communist depiction of the Polish working class. Instead, she injected into the public sphere photographic records that turned the communist renderings of the workers' social and political face much more personal and complex. In doing so, Garlicka gave the workers a means to emancipate their national and private aspirations from communist ideology, as she enabled them to recount their self-narrated history.

Fig 1. Exhibition invitation card for *Photography of Polish Peasants*. 1985. Held in folder no. 1985/II in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

In response to her public call for this project, Garlicka received 909 submissions. Altogether they formed a collection of over 10,500 annotated photographs (Garlicka 1989, 9). The majority of those were either group portraits, scenes captured at the factory, or family pictures and snapshots that provided some insights into the more intimate worlds of the workers. Garlicka placed photographs of factories and people at work alongside those of the workers in domestic scenes – with their children, among their loved ones, and during recreational activities. These juxtapositions exposed the workers' adherence to materialistic and

conservative social values that were more akin to those cherished by the bourgeoisie class. Aware of the implications, Garlicka printed on the exhibition invitation card an image that complied with the communist imagination of the ideal worker, once again as a means to detract from the less submissive nature of the display (fig. 2).

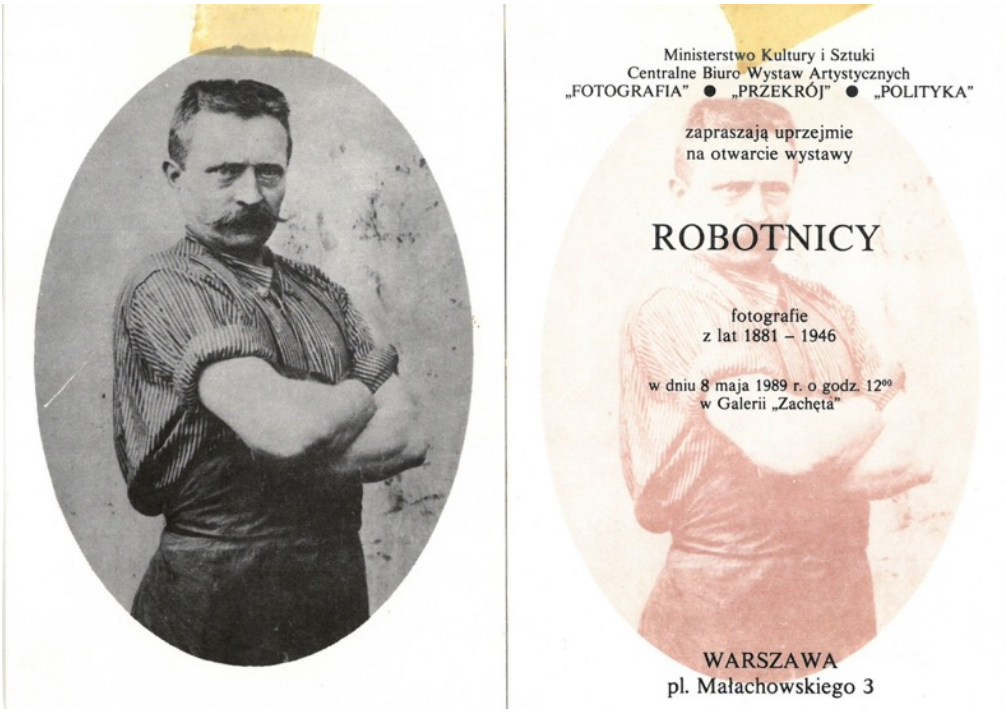

Fig 2. Exhibition invitation card for *Workers*. 1989. Held in folder 1989/I in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

The successful impact of Garlicka's open-call strategy was clearly articulated in the relatively large number of reviews that both *Photography of Polish Peasants* and *Workers* received in the Polish press. Journalist and photographer Andrzej A. Mroczkowski associated the 1985 show with the exhibition *Poles' Self Portrait* of 1979–80. In his analysis, "*Photography of Polish Peasants* imparts not only a lot of information about the peasants' history, but it also reveals their self-perception, showing how they saw themselves" (Mroczkowski 1985). Even more explicitly impressed by the endeavor was renowned writer and journalist Wiesław Myśliwski (1985) who titled his review "For Me This Collection is a Revelation". Myśliwski encouraged viewers of the exhibition to see it as a show evidencing the actual historical living conditions and social characteristics of the Polish peasantry. Using a degree of sarcasm, he prompted them to understand the photographs as objective reflections of the past rather than as proof of the misleading narratives constructed by the communists about the alleged repression and exploitation of peasants prior to the establishment of the socialist state:

> Let's not impose on this collection any tendencies, political, sociological or others. Doing so we will reduce its value to illustration of what we or some of us would like to see in it. Photographs are as they are, and one should only see in them, what's in them. To look for what's not in them will not provide us with their greatest interpretation, and can lead to manipulation. […] Perhaps there are somewhere photographs of great poverty, which we are lacking here; photographs of people who served landowners, of struggles for social emancipation and so on, but we don't know that. We cannot claim that the collection is incomplete when we cannot even be sure whether the pictures that we might be missing have ever existed.

Garlicka's aspirations did not go unacknowledged by reviewers of *Workers* either. Historian Daria Nałęcz (1989) explained in her exhibition review that:

> Until recently the working class had been an object and not a subject of historical narration. The percentage of testimonies left by the workers themselves constitutes only a small number of all the sources concerning their history. Not writing about themselves, the workers have left an empty space for other authors to fill, mostly from the intelligentsia, whose attitudes and views, ranging from favorable to hostile, have shaped a stereotypic image of this group, far from real, which nevertheless still dominates people's minds in our time […] The exhibition presented in Warsaw Zachęta defies any stereotypes […] and it exposes the myths and imaginaries that gave form to an inauthentic description of the workers and their value system. Instead, it puts on display an image of the group that they sketched with their own will and hand.

A review by journalist Stefan Kozicki (1989) presented a similar analysis. The old image of the workers had been created by sociologists who turned them into a class, he claimed. Explaining that the family pictures displayed by Garlicka exposed the workers' inner characteristics to the public, he argued that the exhibition altered their traditional image. No longer did they appear as "activists, heroes who fought for social justice, but simply as human beings" (Kozicki 1989).

In a document preserved in her personal archive, Garlicka noted that the curatorial strategy she employed when preparing her photographic displays was inspired by her encounter with the 1955 MoMA (Museum of Modern Art, New York) exhibition, *The Family of Man*. For its organization, Edward Steichen – at the time director of MoMA's Department of Photography – also advertised a call for photographic submissions, which in this case was open to professional photographers and amateur camera users from all over the world. MoMA promoted the resulting exhibition as both a credible record of the universality of the human experience and a declaration of international commitment to global unity, following the Second World War and its aftermath. For its humanist message, it was shown around the world, on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Mainly orchestrated by the United States' Information Agency, however, the exhibition also subtly aspired to propagate the notion of individual freedom and

democratic values, including acceptance of social diversity and tolerance of cultural difference, neither of which characterized the spirit of communist politics in the Eastern Bloc. To this end, *The Family of Man* made diverse cultural subjects of multiple geographies visible through photographic images that they produced for and about themselves. These were accompanied by affectionate images taken by others, in order to give expression to the values that the photographed subjects held in high esteem (Kaplan 2005, 55–80; Sekula 1981, 19–21). In following the essence of this curatorial model and applying its strategy in the Polish national context, Garlicka increased the socio-political visibility of the complex fabric of Polish society. Thereby, she redirected interest away from the principles of social cohesion and unity adhered to by communist political leaders towards those of diversity and pluralism, which were largely valued by the governed social layer during the 1980s.

Keeping Up Appearances

The peculiar installation of photographs in *The Family of Man* was also a source of inspiration for Garlicka's organization of the gallery space in her 1985 and 1989 exhibitions, not least as it was modelled on the design of the Soviet pavilion that Russian artist El (Lazar Markovich) Lissitzky designed for the 1928 International Press Exhibition in Cologne (*Pressa*). In El Lissitzky's installation strategy, form followed function; photographs were spread across the exhibition rooms, on the walls, floors, and even the ceiling in order to activate the viewers in space. The seeming lack of the photographs' hierarchical or rational organization coerced the viewers into investigating the space without following any rigid pathways, and at their own pace. Providing the exhibition visitors with numerous attractions, this method stimulated their senses and instructed them to increase their engagement with the exhibits. It therefore emancipated the viewers from any prescribed politics of looking, vision, and meaning. Nevertheless, especially during the early decades of the Cold War, both the USSR and the USA adopted El Lissitzky's exhibition design strategy for it had proved effective at leading audiences to absorb the knowledge and information presented to them in the exhibition space without feeling compelled to do so. As Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (1984, 109) has put it, "what in Lissitzky's hands had been a tool of instruction, political education, and the raising of consciousness was rapidly transformed into an instrument for prescribing the silence of conformity and obedience". Garlicka preferred the American manipulation of the model, which Steichen's *The Family of Man* defined as a means to celebrate individual self-determination, embrace national difference, and promote international unity. Yet the model's acceptance by the so-called East and West, coupled with the differing interpretation it had acquired within the context of these two geopolitical environments, enabled her to employ it to propagate the values of Western humanism in ceremonial compliance with the propagandistic politics of Eastern humanism.

In 1985, when Garlicka was preparing her exhibition *Photography of Polish Peasants*, the Polish state was still not as tolerant of deviations from formal communist ideology as it would be gradually compelled to become later in the 1980s. Attempting to imbue *Photography*

of Polish Peasants with a sense of political legitimacy, Garlicka incorporated into its design some familiar motifs from a local 1949 exhibition that applied a number of El Lissitzky's installation principles as a means to celebrate the successful establishment and achievements of the newly established Soviet-led communist Polish government.

Opening under the title *Peace is Winning* on 10 December 1949 at the National Museum in Warsaw, the exhibition featured 945 photographs on the theme of peace in the postwar period. They were gathered by the Polish Association of Photographers from 69 professional photographers and accomplished photography enthusiasts who responded to a brief requiring them to produce photographic images that illustrated the successful rebuilding of Poland under the influence of the new governing establishment. With official portraits of Stalin and President of the Republic of Poland Bolesław Bierut overlooking the exhibition space, *Peace is Winning* showcased the majority of the selected photographs as modest prints of 30 × 40 cm, yet each was mounted onto the center of a significantly larger clear glass plate. The plates were suspended from the ceiling by transparent strings, and organized into two parallel rows across the space. Denoting the colors of the Polish flag and the PZPR's logo, white wooden frames demarcated one portion of plates while red ones surrounded the others (Szymanowicz 2016, 193–202). The use of frames much larger than the size of the photographs on display meant that viewers were unable to fully experience one picture in isolation from others. Whenever they set their eyes on one individual photograph, a series of others was introduced into their field of vision. For the same reason, they were equally unable to avoid noticing the presence of other viewers within the suspended frames. As a result, *Peace is Winning* enclosed its visitors by depictions of the many efforts that people in the country were making to rebuild Poland, at the very same time as the exhibits framed each of their viewers as equal participants in the collective endeavor of the socialist project (fig. 3).

Garlicka seems to have found the effect that the frames exerted on the administration of the exhibition space and its visitors particularly useful to advance her own political interests in 1985. Deploying a series of large wooden frames throughout the exhibition space of *Photography of Polish Peasants* (fig. 4), she used them to converge the photographed historical figures and their viewers in the present into the same space. This pastiche of the spatial, temporal, and visual experience of *Peace is Winning* made her display seem obedient to communist politics. However, coupled with her decision to enlarge some of the photographs to human scale, in the context of *Photography of Polish Peasants* it symbolically demolished the gap between past and present that was otherwise separating the exhibition visitors from the photographed subjects (fig. 5). Inspiring the audience's suspension of disbelief, the installation opened up an imaginary space in which they were able to conceive themselves and fellow exhibition visitors as eyewitnesses to their national ancestors, whose appearance and perceived aspirations the communists replaced with others that were more suitable for their political agenda (Mroczkowski 1985).

Fig 3. View from the exhibition *Peace is Winning*. Photographer unknown, 1949. Object no. DI 104521 in the Iconographic and Photographic Collection in the National Museum in Warsaw.

Fig 4. View from the exhibition *Photography of Polish Peasants*. Photo: Adam Kaczkowski, 1985. Held in folder 1985 in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

Fig 5. View from the exhibition *Photography of Polish Peasants*. Photo: Adam Kaczkowski, 1985. Held in folder 1985 in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

Whereas in 1989 the Polish state was much more tolerant of political diversity, Garlicka still embraced some principles from El Lissitzky's exhibition strategy in *Workers*, this time following a model more akin to that exploited in *The Family of Man*. Similar to her 1985 exhibition, Garlicka showed enlarged copies of the photographs she obtained – mostly 2.10 × 2.70 m and 2 × 2 m – in an attempt to obliterate conventional visual and aesthetic hierarchies, as well as the traditional separation between subjects and objects, audiences and exhibits (Lech Charewicz, personal communication, 17 January 2019). Fixing and suspending the photographs throughout and across the exhibition space, she once again avoided guiding her audiences to follow a linearly organized line-up of pictures, which would have culminated into an autocratic ideological statement. Instead, she left them to discover and unpack the photographs by themselves (figs. 6-8).[7]

Garlicka's adoption of El Lissitzky's seemingly nonauthoritative installation strategy when presenting otherwise politically challenging photographs made it simpler for her to promote her pluralistic approach to Poland's society and history without making it all too obvious. After all, her reintroduction of his exhibition style to the Polish cultural sphere of the second half of the 1980s created a smoke screen of the most traditional spirit of early communist culture, satisfying communist desire to awaken collective engagement as well as engagement with the social collective at the same time. With each display she therefore not only presented the Polish public with alternative narratives to communist historiography but she also encouraged her audiences to learn about their history and society through direct exploration of their tangible cultural heritage.

Fig 6. View from the exhibition *Workers*. Photo: Lech Charewicz, 1989. Held in folder 1989 in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

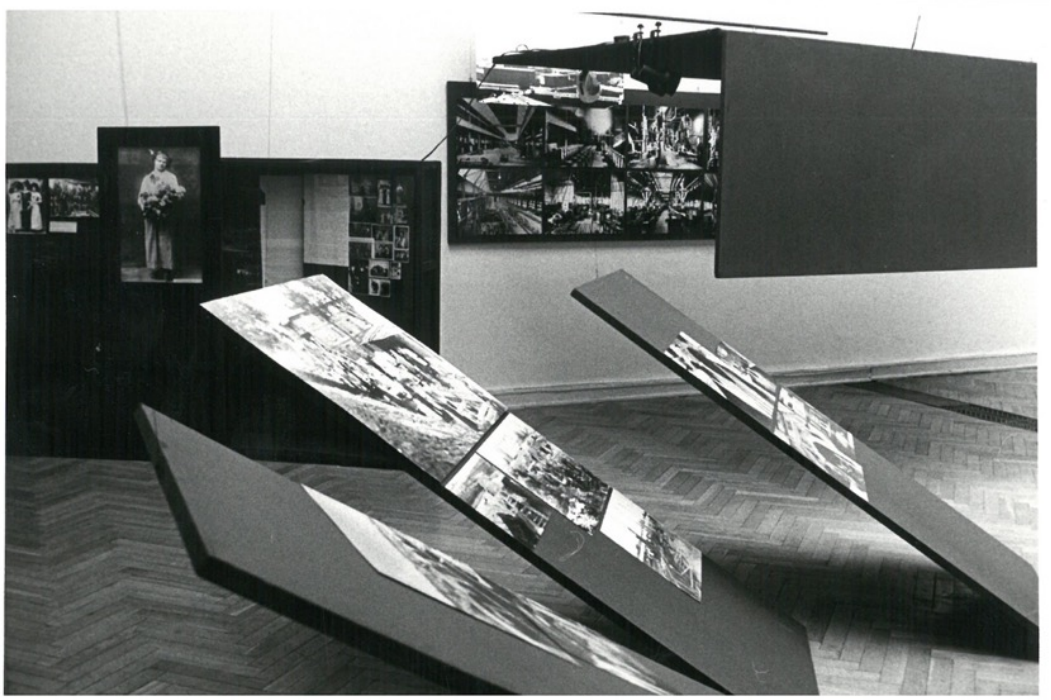

Fig 7. View from the exhibition *Workers*. Photo: Lech Charewicz, 1989. Held in folder 1989 in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

Fig 8. View from the exhibition *Workers*. Photo: Lech Charewicz, 1989. Held in folder 1989 in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

Democratizing Society and Culture

The early 1990s signified a new beginning for Poland and the Polish people. As the Soviet Union's political status and influence over the Eastern Bloc began decreasing in the second half of the 1980s, Poland's economy declined rapidly and the Polish government had no means to restore its stability. Public opposition to PZPR subsequently became common, as did socio-political instability in the country. In an attempt to bring the social unrest to an end, the government instigated a series of official diplomatic meetings with leaders of *Solidarity* and representatives of other opposition groups. Known as the Polish Round Table Talks, they were held between February and April 1989. Although the government hoped to reinstate socio-political stability in the country simply by luring the opposition leaders into its ranks, the result of the talks came in the form of a binding agreement that gradually led to the emergence of a democratic government and the establishment of market economy. The Main Office of Control of Publications and Shows was liquidated in April 1990. Leader of *Solidarity* Lech Wałęsa was elected President of Poland in December 1990, and a free parliamentary election took place in October 1991. Poland entered its post-communist era (Davies 2005, 500–513).

For Garlicka, as for any other intellectual in the country at that period, this new reality meant that she was no longer required to run any of her writings or the content of her exhibitions past the mechanisms of censorship. She was now in a position to consult photographs of any period she wished in order to reconstruct the history of the Polish nation more comprehensively, and she was able to share her findings more openly than ever before. Feeling it was time to confront the haunting legacies of the previous governing rule firmly and directly, her critical attitude towards the communist treatment of Polish heritage and social history became explicit and her calls for the democratization of the Polish cultural sphere louder. In practice, she continued increasing the public visibility of previously repressed histories. Yet, as Poland was simultaneously moving deeper into its post-communist phase, she gradually began to frame her projects as sites in which to negotiate the future values of the Polish nation through examination of its troubled past attributes.

Memory Rework

Already in mid-1989, preparing for a new photography exhibition, Garlicka felt the time was right to publicize an open call for private photographs concerning the Polish history of the city and people of Lwów, of which, as she explained in retrospective, "for almost half a century we could not write or talk about publicly" (1997, 10). Throughout the interwar period Lwów was part of the Second Polish Republic and one of its most dominant cultural centers. During the Second World War it was under Soviet and, later, German occupation. After the war, following the Yalta Conference of February 1945, in which the Allied leaders reorganized the boarders in Europe, Lwów was incorporated into the Soviet Union, and Polish nationals were subsequently forced to relocate to the newly demarcated territory of the Polish Republic. The decision was considered highly controversial in the eyes of the Poles, not least because an overwhelming majority of the city's population was Polish. To suppress any contestations of the postwar reorganization of borders in Europe, and to prevent the emergence of an understanding of the Soviets as oppressors of the Polish people, Lwów's Polish past became virtually unmentionable in communist Poland.

Garlicka sought to break that taboo. Originally from Lwów herself, and a member of the Society of Lwów Enthusiasts, she felt that the displaced inhabitants of the city were eager to remind themselves of their hometown.[8] Her 1989 open call for photographs about Lwów and its people created an opportunity for Polish citizens to bring the home city of many of them into the nation's collective memory (Garlicka 1991, 6). Aware of the multinational characteristic that Lwów had enjoyed during the Second Polish Republic, and being herself of Jewish descent, Garlicka made it a special point to clarify that the appeal was meant for members of all national and religious groups (bacz 1989; "Lwowiacy i ich miasto" 1989).

Two years later, on 5 March 1991, Garlicka opened the exhibition with the title *The People of Lwów and their City: Photographs 1860–1945*. It was installed at the Zachęta Gallery, where Garlicka had also installed her previous exhibitions, although in 1991 the building was transitioning from the headquarter of the Central Bureau for Art Exhibitions to a

home for a State Gallery of Art. In one of the exhibition spaces she suspended a panoramic view of the city from the ceiling (figs. 9-10). With the exception of one of the gallery rooms, which she dedicated to the work of Lwów's Polish art photographers, she installed the other photographs chronologically ("Lwowiacy i ich miasto w 'Zachęcie'" 1991). The way in which viewers were guided to follow a linear unfolding of the pictorial history of Lwów to its abrupt end with photographs from 1945 pointed at the Soviets as having been responsible for the final decline of the city's Polish history and the painful fate of its Polish inhabitants (fig. 11). In *Lwów and its People*, an illustrated issue of the magazine *Przekrój* that Garlicka published in 1991 as a companion to her exhibition, she also explicitly held the Soviets (as well as the Nazi Germans) responsible for the loss of much of the photographic heritage of Polish citizens from Lwów. Explaining how frustrated she was to have received only 173 responses to her open call, she noted that:

> Family photographs, paper cards that cannot speak, accompany people's fate […] The biggest wave of [Polish] émigrés who headed west [to Poland] between 1945 and 1947 had the greatest chance of packing their family souvenirs before they left, although sudden and unexpected deportations were not uncommon even during that period. Those whom the Soviets kidnaped at night and deported to the [Soviet republics of the] far east between 1940 and 1941 did not have the chance to pack souvenirs, more important were warm clothes and food […] Photographs vanish with people. (Garlicka 1991, 6)

Fig 9. View from the exhibition *The People of Lwów and Their City: Photographs 1860-1945*. Photo: Jerzy Sabara, 1991. Object no. Z.76/IIIaF/1 in the Department of Iconographic Collections at the National Library of Poland. Courtesy of the National Library of Poland.

Fig 10. View from the exhibition *The People of Lwów and Their City: Photographs 1860-1945*. Photo: Jerzy Sabara, 1991. Object no. Z.76/IIIaF/2 in the Department of Iconographic Collections at the National Library of Poland. Courtesy of the National Library of Poland.

Fig 11. View from the exhibition *The People of Lwów and Their City: Photographs 1860-1945*. Photo: Jerzy Sabara, 1991. Object no. Z.76/IIIaF/3 in the Department of Iconographic Collections at the National Library of Poland. Courtesy of the National Library of Poland.

Reviewers of the exhibition understood that Garlicka's installation was not intended as merely an uncritical reconstruction of the city's history. They instantly identified it as a means of uniting a large segment of the Polish nation in its struggle to break free from the shackles of the communist past. Reportedly, they and visitors to the exhibition also recognized it as an attempt to activate the Polish people to salvage what had been left of their pre-communist cultural heritage, with a view to securing the future perpetuation of the nation's collective memory. Perhaps most telling in this regard are the words journalist Anna Baczewska (1991) wrote after visiting the show:

> The people of Lwów are reaching to their jewelry cases, wardrobes, and drawers and carrying their treasures because it is finally possible to show them publicly, because they want to save their city from oblivion, and because they want to pass the city's memory to their children and grandchildren… […] Until recently it would have not been possible because Lwów was a subject of taboo. […] Some of the owners of the photographs on display are prepared to donate them for the creation of a museum about Lwów or the Kresy [the eastern borderlands of the Second Polish Republic]. […] An idea for the establishment of such a museum has just begun sprouting. (See also "Lwowiacy i ich miasto. Wystawa w 'Zachęcie'" 1991, 2)

A number of the photographs included in the exhibition also gave expression to Lwów's rich multicultural past. Garlicka considered them particularly valuable examples of how photographic sources could be used to research not only Polish social history but also the histories of Poland's national minority groups (1997, 10). In 1983, having encountered a collection of photographs about the lives of Polish Jews, Garlicka had already mentioned her interest in collating from local private collections and public institutions photographs about the rich history and heritage of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Polish Jewry (1983, 13). Her renewed interest in historical photographs about Poland's national minorities coincided with the growing attention that Polish academics were giving to the subject of Poland's national and cultural heterogeneity at the beginning of the post-communist era.

Present Absentees and the Returning Demons of the Past

The Polish People's Republic made numerous attempts to homogenize the Polish human landscape, with the intention of eliminating any obvious sights that challenged the equalizing spirit of socialist humanism or the official affirmation that, following the implementation of the Yalta Agreement, no national minority groups lived in Poland as of the postwar period. As a rule, therefore, for as long as PZPR governed their country, Polish intellectuals and academics were not able to study or share their knowledge about Poland's national minorities without risking their position and future career. This informal prohibition was annulled in 1990, when PZPR dissolved and a new, pro-democratic political system gradually formed (cf. Davies 2005, 514–515).

Having witnessed through her 1991 exhibition how productive photographs can be in foregrounding understandings of Poland's national minorities, in the same year Garlicka joined forces with some of her academic peers in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where she was working then, to embark on another battle with the haunting legacies of communist culture. They set out to organize a scientific conference on the situation of national minorities who lived in Poland and Europe at large at the time, in conjunction with a photography exhibition on the history of Poland's national minorities. The endeavor was partly informed by the realization that the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc and the re-emergence of Poland as an emancipated democratic state had renewed nationalist debates about minorities' social and political rights of the kinds Europe faced throughout the interwar period. On the one hand, these led the Poles to consider how to define their national identity after nearly half a century in which it had predominantly been defined by the powers in Moscow. On the other, the same nationalist debates brought back the language of condescending stereotypes (Władyka 1994, 5).

The resulting conference consisted of two panels, held between 16 and 19 September 1992. Named *Others Amongst Us*, one of those was exclusively dedicated to the subject of Poland's minorities, and Garlicka curated an accompanying photography exhibition on the same theme. Also bearing the title *Others Amongst Us* (*Inni wśród swoich*), it was shown in the Museum of Independence in Warsaw between 14 September and 31 October 1992.

Due to shortage of time, Garlicka mainly curated the exhibition from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs that she found in archives. She expected that an open call for submissions might, however, enable her to salvage old photographs kept in people's homes, as well as to obtain more personal and recent visual accounts. In May 1992 she advertised a public appeal, explaining that:

> [The exhibition's] aim is to show the multinational face of Poland's contemporary inhabitants. After the Second World War, for 45 years, they [the communist authorities] had convinced us that Poland became nationally homogenic as a result of the tragedy of the war and subsequent to the reorganization of borders in line with the Yalta Pact. It is not true […] We are appealing for help from individuals and families coming from Belarusian, Gypsy, Russian, Slovak, Tatar, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Jewish backgrounds as well as Karaites and Lemkos, who are willing to take part in the project by sharing with us their family photography collections. The organizers are interested in […] any photographs referring to national minorities in Poland, from the moment of the invention of photography to the present day. (Garlicka 1992a; see also 1992b)

Including a number of the photographs received following the call, the resulting exhibition featured over 1,000 pictures of Belarusians, Gypsies, Greeks, Karaites, Slovaks, Jews, and others taken between 1861 and 1991. It made visible "the richness and variety of national and religious minorities who have been present for centuries in Poland" (Wrób 1992). As such, the exhibition was, according to Garlicka (1994a, 151), the first to document the full range of

minorities who co-existed with the Poles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, together with their input to society and culture.

One part of the show provided a taxonomy of national minority groups who lived on Polish lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The second focused on shared efforts and difficulties of Poles and national minority groups to build culture and civilization together (Garlicka 1994a, 151). Garlicka incorporated into the displays a range of items that represented the culture and traditions of each of the groups (figs. 12-13). In addition, alongside the photographic exhibits she presented some schoolbooks on Polish literature and dictionaries of Polish language. Their authors' surnames were meant to constitute examples of the contributions minorities made to the development of Polish culture and the preservation of Polish heritage. Yet, to ensure a non-biased representation of history, Garlicka also displayed photographs and documents alluding to conflicts, clashes, discord, and crimes (Wrób 1992).

Fig 12. View from the exhibition *Others Among Us*, showing the space allocated for national minorities of Ukrainian and Lemkos origin. Photographer Unknown, 1992. Object no. Z.74/IIIF/2 in the Department of Iconographic Collections at the National Library of Poland. Courtesy of the National Library of Poland.

Fig 13. View from the exhibition *Others Among Us*, showing the space allocated for national minorities of Jewish origin. Photographer Unknown, 1992. Object no. Z.74/IIIF/8 in the Department of Iconographic Collections at the National Library of Poland. Courtesy of the National Library of Poland.

Others Amongst Us certainly elaborated knowledge about Poland's cultural history and made the multinational character of Polish society more visible. At the same time, the labor that went behind its organization made Garlicka cognizant of the challenges the Polish hegemony still had to overcome with regard to its relationship with national minorities in the country's post-communist phase. Pointing out that only a relatively small number of individuals had responded to her public appeal, Garlicka argued that "for sure it was determined by the hostile actions carried out by the previous communist authorities against national minorities, and perhaps also by the minorities' xenophobia" (1994a, 151). Voicing a similar view during the related conference panel that was hosted by the Institute of Literary Research in Warsaw, she explained that:

> It was quite a surprise, although one that could have been anticipated, that mainly those minorities who do not have their own countries were keen to participate. It was difficult to get to other minorities. Those who already have their own countries […] usually wanted to create this kind of an exhibition, but only by themselves and about themselves.[9]

Despite, or maybe because of, her acquired insights, in a review of her show published the day after its opening Garlicka was quoted clarifying that she "would like this exhibition to teach tolerance" (Wrób 1992). She then added that "[t]oday it is especially important as, in times when we can speak about everything, the demons of the past are waking up again".

Perhaps Garlicka was too naive and idealistic in imagining that any form of historical knowledge and understanding could so effectively fight deeply rooted feelings such as racist and nationalist sentiments, or the existential angst that minority groups may experience precisely because their livelihood and wellbeing are conditioned by the goodwill of the larger social group around them. If nothing else, however, the challenges she experienced and the minorities she encountered while putting the exhibition together called attention to some of the scars that the communist repression of national minorities had left behind, and the lack of faith that some minorities had in the ability of the post-communist state to implement democracy any better than PZPR.

The Friends and Foes Within

Whereas Garlicka was not particularly surprised that Polish national minorities largely chose not to participate in *Others Amongst Us*, she was reportedly frustrated to have faced a similar challenge when gathering materials for her next exhibition (1997, 11–12). Attempting to complete her taxonomization of Polish society, this time she aspired to celebrate the Polish intelligentsia. Having emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, when Austria, Prussia, and Russia gradually came to dominate the Polish land, by the early twentieth century the social class of the intelligentsia had grown to constitute the elite of Polish society. Members of the intelligentsia were national patriots who fostered Polish history, cultural heritage, language, and the perceived authenticity of the Poles as a people more broadly, as they aspired to see Poland independent once again. In the interwar period, when Poland achieved independence, the intelligentsia was the lively force in the country, with its members being well positioned to disseminate their values and ways of life to the broader social fabric of the Polish nation. But during the Second World War they were imprisoned or executed by the Nazi Germans and Soviets alike. Those who survived to live in the Polish People's Republic were subject to further abuse, as in the new reality of communist rule they were seen as dangerous nationalists (Walicki 2005). Herself a descendent of interwar members of the intelligentsia, it was this multifaceted history of resilience, persecution, and perseverance that Garlicka aspired to make visible in public, having been beyond the pale in the communist state.

Fig 14. View from the exhibition *Polish Intelligentsia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: Photographs 1848-1989*. Photo: Anna Pietrzak-Bartos, 1995. Held in folder IV/1995 in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

Fig 15. View from the exhibition *Polish Intelligentsia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: Photographs 1848-1989*. Photo: Anna Pietrzak-Bartos, 1995. Held in folder IV/1995 in the archival collection of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. Courtesy of Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition opened to the public in Zachęta on 19 October 1995**,** under the title *Polish Intelligentsia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: Photographs 1848–1989* (figs. 14-15). As with her previous curatorial projects, Garlicka wanted the lion's share of the exhibition to draw on family collections as a way of offering the nation a greater insight into the lives of the intelligentsia. In February 1994 she publicized a call for participation, announcing 1981 as the latest time of interest to the curator (Garlicka 1994b). That year also signified the accelerated consolidation of *Solidarity* and the subsequent imposition of Martial law, implying the reappearance of a *patriotic* intelligentsia on the stage of Polish politics, this time as supporters of the country's dissatisfied workers. But as some participants still submitted photographs from later years in the 1980s, the intended historical scope of the exhibition was expanded.

In total, the open call received the attention of no more than 175 individuals, who provided Garlicka with over 4,200 photographs, mostly about the nineteenth-century, postwar, and interwar intelligentsia (Dajbor 1994). Only five submissions arrived from the generation of those who constituted the majority of the intelligentsia in the 1960s and later. Garlicka was disappointed by their reluctance to participate, especially as in the late 1970s and early 1980s many of them had taken up leadership positions in the nation's fight for democratization (Kersten 1997, 178).

Considering her abovementioned rationale for the organization of a show on the intelligentsia class, Garlicka must have also been unprepared for the critical reviews it received, some of which help clarify what might have led the younger intelligentsia to opt out. "A whole large part of the exhibition refers to the postwar period", publicist Adam Krzemiński (1995, 73) wrote in his review:

> The photographs in this section reveal traces of "the civil disgrace" and "captive minds" of the Polish intelligentsia […] They show young individuals on evening courses and peasant children completing their studies with renowned professors who kept their positions after the war. Their students would become the leaders of the opposition as well as supporters of the Stalinist doctrine.

The civil disgrace and captive minds of the intelligentsia that Krzemiński evoked allude to two critical books, one by Jacek Trznadel (1986) and the other by Czesław Miłosz (1953), each portraying the intelligentsia who continued living their normal lives in Poland's postwar era as facilitators of the establishment of the communist regime. While the communist Polish state mostly persecuted and eliminated them, it simultaneously needed their assistance, as educated people, in successfully running society and state institutions. Whether by threats or the promise of reward, PZPR enticed the more compliant amongst the intelligentsia to serve the socialist endeavor, until a socialist-raised generation of elites, loyal to the communist project, would be ready to replace them (Kersten 1997, 170). In Krzemiński's eyes, the family photographs presented in the postwar section of the exhibition provided unambiguous evidence of the intelligentsia's collaboration with the emerging political regime as they visualized their involvement in the provision of formal state education to workers and peasants.

Doubts concerning the national loyalty of the intelligentsia emerged in the Polish public sphere long before Garlicka opened the doors of her 1995 exhibition, and it was not limited to the postwar generation alone. In fact, in the 1960s and 1970s, when a large portion of Poles were educated thanks to the implementation of socialist policies in the country over a period of two decades, the intelligentsia seems to have ceased to exist as a clearly defined networked social group of organized individuals. The term "intelligentsia" had largely become a reference to a social class of the past and a rising young generation of academic and professional experts – leaders in their fields – who were nevertheless unrelated to the lineage of the original social class. Often members of PZPR, they took up positions as professional specialists in a larger all-encompassing socio-political system and were, therefore, often perceived as the tamed products of the communist state (Kurczewska 1992). The snapshots and family photographs received by Garlicka in relation to that time period supported the dishonorable reputation of these members of the intelligentsia too, portraying them as medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, respected artists, film and theatre directors, scholars, and teachers, who as such sustained the authorities' force, whether willingly, reluctantly, or inadvertently.

Garlicka was all too aware of the fluctuations in the intelligentsia's past. As suggested by her 1994 call for submissions, she wished to conclude their visual history on a positive note, celebrating the re-emergence of an intelligentsia whose members stood by the nation and endeavored to protect its people and spirit during the birth of *Solidarity*. Yet the exhibition troubled Poland's sociocultural sphere even further subsequently, as during the 1980s it became apparent that a significantly large number of the intelligentsia continued working with the communist authorities. A historical study published by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. soon after Poland entered its post-communist stage argued that "[t]he strong presence of the intelligentsia in the party influenced the policy of the ruling elite away from standard Soviet practice, flavoring it instead with pragmatic nationalism" (Curtis 1994, 76). Responses to Garlicka's exhibition make it apparent that the Polish public not only understood the intelligentsia's involvement with the party differently but that it also considered the show an attempt to clear their reputation unreasonably.

According to cultural critic and journalist Tomasz Mościcki (1995), for example, the exhibition was merely "a farewell to a dying or doomed class" that had no place in the post-communist world of Polish society. "The portrait of the Polish intelligentsia in Zachęta is inconclusive", he pointed out in his exhibition review in disapproval of Garlicka's declared preference to exclude photographs from the 1980s, which might have indeed discouraged some members of the intelligentsia from sending them anyway. "It may be useful in fact to show pictures form that period", he added, "if only because they could remind some viewers of the betrayal of the intelligentsia – if only because they could remind them of themselves". As another example, journalist Andrzej Ruchałowski (1995) also expressed his regrets that "[i]t was possible to find in the exhibition only a few photographs of the new intelligentsia, intelligentsias without lineage who were created by the postwar revolution". Calling his elaborated analytical review "Where is the Intelligentsia?", he argued that Garlicka's exhibition failed to complete the collective portrait of Polish society as it in fact conflated the respected intelligentsia of the turn of the nineteenth century with those who either abandoned the class

values or became intelligentsia under communist supervision. Expressing a need to distinguish between these groups he raised the questions:

> Who can be called an intelligent today? What does the word intelligentsia mean? Does this layer, typical to central-eastern Europe of the turn of the nineteenth century still exist? Is a member of intelligentsia today someone with higher education, a creator, politician, economist, or a businessman? What characterizes the contemporary intelligent? (Ruchałowski 1995)

As opposed to Mościcki's views, however, Ruchałowski suggested that Garlicka's exhibition opened up possibilities for an investigation of the moral qualities of the "old" and "new" intelligentsia in comparison to one another, to determine who, in post-communist Poland, might still be considered as a legitimate descendent of the intelligentsia class. "Despite the political changes that occurred after 1989, we still do not know how to define intelligentsia", he explained, suggesting that "[p]erhaps the ongoing exhibition *Polish Intelligentsia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* at Zachęta will make it easier" (Ruchałowski 1995).

Indeed, even though Garlicka's 1995 exhibition raised more questions than it was able to answer, it stirred the Polish public to debate the past and future status of the intelligentsia through consideration of personal visual records that attested to the inability to group the members of this class together. In this sense, it could be argued that, despite its somewhat critical reception, the exhibition that concluded Garlicka's long-term attempt to reconstruct the photographic and social histories of Polish Society did in fact fulfil its potential.

Legacies and Lessons

Aleksandra Garlicka passed away in 2012. Although much more can be written about her work from the 1980s and 1990s, our discussion of her photographic writings and curatorial activities has enabled us to bring some nuance to Poland's history of photography of that period, which we achieved by two means. First, we expanded the conceptual scope of this history into issues concerning family and archival photographs, their functions, and their absorption into momentous political processes. Second, we turned our attention to photographic exhibitions that received much attention from the Polish public back in the day, but that photography historians have nevertheless overlooked since then. As we pointed out earlier, reasons for this may range from the more common interest of photography historians in artistic practices to the influence of academic tendencies to elaborate knowledge on explicitly radical photographic initiatives from that turbulent era in Polish history.

Discussing Garlicka's uses of family and archival photographs, we demonstrated how she embedded them in sociocultural processes that resulted in the restructuring of Poland's social histories, in the expansion of the Polish nation's collective memory, and in challenging Poland's adaptation to pluralistic democracy. Based on her own writings and curatorial strategy, it is clear that Garlicka strongly believed in the power of such photographs to provide

a diverse, nuanced, complicated, and therefore more accurate description of society than can be given by institutional histories. One may, nevertheless, rightly wonder what impact her work might have actually had on Polish public history and culture. To begin to answer this question, we want to clarify that, as did state censors, Garlicka already understood in the late 1980s that while temporary displays of photographs might encourage their exploration and might even lead to initiating related social, national and cultural debates, they are rather unlikely to make any long-lasting impact. The early 1990s, in which Poland began to emerge as a post-communist state, did not give Garlicka any reason to assume otherwise either. She knew, in other words, that if the photographs she gathered throughout her decade-long project were to make any noteworthy, lasting difference to Polish historiography, collective memory, or society, they had to circulate in public more widely. They had to meet their viewers beyond the gallery walls as regularly as possible in the capacity of source materials in historical collections and as informative visual accounts in widespread and academic literature alike.

In order to facilitate this, still in the 1980s Garlicka deposited reproductions of all the photographs and letters she received for *Photography of Polish Peasants* and *Workers* in archival public collections. The former has become part of the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Sciences (as of 1992: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences) and the latter, part of the Museum of the History of the Revolution Movement in Łódź (as of 1990: Tradition of Independence Museum). Although in the context of the early 1990s Garlicka was in a position to evoke images and memories of the past without any externally imposed restrictions, she continued endeavoring to render her photographic finds and their analysis accessible to society on a more permanent basis. She accompanied the opening of her 1991, 1992, and 1995 exhibitions by academic symposia on the subject matter explored by each of them. She also solicited a range of critical and analytical essays from intellectuals, historians, and publicists alike, some of which she published in exhibition catalogues and illustrated conference proceedings and others in magazines and newspapers.

Undeniably, in order to organize her exhibitions when PZPR still dominated the state, Garlicka had to work with the Central Bureau for Art Exhibitions and thus, by extension, also with the Ministry for Art and Culture. As we mentioned earlier, especially given the pro-democratic activist spirit that prevailed within Polish society in the 1980s, artists and intellectuals often looked with suspicion at those who still chose to maintain professional links with the establishment, sometimes even accusing them of social and national betrayal. While we have not encountered any document or commentary portraying Garlicka or discrediting her professional endeavors in such or similar terms, we have equally found no trace or mention of her work in any photographic scholarship concerning photography, photographic practices, or photographic exhibitions in communist or post-communist Poland. Practically speaking, Garlicka and her work have been written out of the history of photography in the country. We cannot ascertain whether the reason has to do with her continued work with the establishment in the late 1980s. Yet, following our extensive research into primary sources concerning the publications, curatorial practices, and exhibitions Garlicka developed throughout the period covered by the article, we feel it is at least partly our duty to mention that they consistently

point to her interest in nothing other than giving expression to an inner sense of social and cultural responsibility.

Indeed, whereas Garlicka and her work are absent from accounts about the history of photography in Poland, her contributions to the diversification of Polish social history have been noted, and her endeavors inspired others to adopt her research and presentation strategies as well as elaborate on her initiatives. In 1993, for example, the Maciej Rataj Foundation initiated the publication of an annotated album of 333 photographs from the collection Garlicka and Maria Bijak gathered for Garlicka's exhibition on peasants. One of the Foundation's main aims has been to commemorate the history of Polish peasants and that of the Polish countryside. The album was printed at the Foundation's expense and the majority of its prints were deposited "in schools, libraries and non-profit educational, cultural and religious institutions across Poland free of charge as a way to preserve the nation's memories of its homeland" (Fundacja im. Macieja Rataja 1993, n.p.). As another example, in 1994, inspired by Garlicka's 1992 exhibition *Others Amongst Us*, the Jewish-Polish Shalom Foundation called upon the public to submit domestic photographs capable of helping to reconstruct the rich sociocultural histories of Polish Jews who lived in the geographical region of Poland before, during, and after the Second World War. While the Nazi Germans exterminated the great majority of Polish Jewry during the Second World War, the Polish People's Republic virtually erased the memory of Polish Jews from Polish history and persecuted the Jews who chose to continue to live in Poland after the war. In a short period of time the Foundation received more than 7,000 annotated photographs, and the project culminated in a large-scale exhibition that opened at Zachęta in 1996 under the title *And I Still See Their Faces* (Pasternak and Ziętkiewicz 2017). The 2007 establishment of a museum about the Polish history of the city of Lwów and its region in Kuklówka Radziejowicka (Muzeum Lwowa i Kresów Południowo-Wschodnich) is another example of the legacy of Garlicka's work, as is the 2012 photographic album *Photography of Peasants from Pomerania*. The former continues to collect and preserve photographs from Polish families whose history involved Lwów or its surroundings. The latter is the result of a two-year long initiative led by the public library of the city of Słupsk. The album narrates the social history of peasants from the region of Pomerania through 365 photographs that the library gathered from local family and public collections through an open call, crediting Garlicka's 1985 exhibition *Photography of Polish Peasants* as its compilers' source of inspiration (Sroka 2012, 5).

Nearly three decades after the democratization of Poland, archival and private photographs as well as emotive photographic displays have become fully absorbed into Polish cultural and historical museums and galleries. Some notable examples are the Warsaw Uprising museum, POLIN – Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk. At the time of writing, this is also the state of affairs in a large number of other museums and galleries around the world. Behind their walls, photography is still often tasked to recreate and bring back to life as well as preserve the worlds that political powers strove to erase. Taking into consideration the rising national and political challenges facing countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the early twenty-first century, and indeed elsewhere around the globe, Garlicka's work may be seen not only as a critical addition to Poland's late-

and post-communist history of photography but also as an exemplar of the responsibility that photography scholars may take upon themselves to render the field of photography studies significant to the prevalence of democratic principles wherever people strive to embrace them.

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Notes

[1] While some brief scholarly discussions of non-artistic photography from Poland of the 1980s do exist, more often than not they revolve around institutional practices, concentrating on issues related to the formal administration of press photography by the censorship mechanisms of the Polish People's Republic and the role photography had played in the dissemination of formal state ideology (see, for example, Donefner 2017, 299–301 and Miedziński 2017, 248).

[2] This is evident in texts published in the Polish journal *Fotografia* from 1978.

[3] A selection of these photographs featured in the 1979 exhibition *Polish Photography 1839–1979*, shown in the International Centre of Photography in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. As the exhibition enjoyed wide coverage in both Polish and Western press, Polish scholars and curators rapidly became interested in elaborating knowledge about photography's local history and in understanding the significance of photographs as historical sources (Kosińska, personal communication, 9 January 2019).

[4] *Fotografia* was initially published in 1953 as a monthly magazine. It closed in 1974 but was relaunched in the form of a quarterly journal in 1976 (Ciastoń 2018).

[5] *Photography of Polish Peasants* was open to the public 12 July–15 September 1985; *Workers*, 8 May–4 June 1989.

[6] Throughout communist rule in Poland (1947–89) there had been no clear guidelines about censorship of photographs. Similar to the state of affairs in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, the Polish state kept a close watch on theatre productions, films, and literary works because of their intrinsic ability to stimulate the intellect, mobilise emotions, and deliver coherent messages to their audiences. Photography was seen as a much more limited medium in this respect: too transparent to trigger reflection, too mechanical to excite, and too fragmentary to articulate ideas clearly and explicitly. As the communists were well aware that, in the hands of experts, photographs may still turn into powerful instruments to mobilize the masses, any photographs that were aimed for wide public circulation did have to obtain approval from the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows. However, because the main concern of state censorship was how ordinary citizens might perceive the photographs, the process normally concentrated on their most immediate interpretation. In addition, it largely relied on their assessors' personal judgment and professional experience (see also Miedziński 2017).

[7] Garlicka's exhibition plan and notes about its installation are preserved in Zachęta's archive in the uncatalogued folder *1989\I*.

[8] The Society was formed in 1988 by a group of Polish citizens from Wrocław who were originally from Lwów.

[9] Unpublished shorthand text from the panel discussion, found in Garlicka's private archive, currently held uncatalogued by the National Library of Poland (Warsaw).